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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 16 June 1992, at 6.15 p.m.

Chairman: Miss SETH (India)

CONTENTS

General debate (conclusion)

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Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 6.20 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (conclusion)

1. Mrs. CANEDO (Observer for Bolivia) said that the entire international community bore the responsibility of ensuring that the world's children had the right to a decent and a productive life. Special attention should be focused on the situation of the developing countries, which were endeavouring, through huge sacrifices, to overcome the legacy of colonialism and dependency. To that end, they were incorporating into national development plans integrated strategies for social and economic development, through which, in 10 years' time, maternal and child mortality in Latin America would be reduced.

2. The promotion of the rights of the child was a crucial element of social policy in Bolivia. The Government had adopted a number of measures to improve the status of mothers and children, such as the National Plan for Maternal and Child Survival and Development; the Ten-Year Plan for Children, which included activities in such areas as health, education, water supply and sanitation, and the care of children in especially difficult circumstances; the prevention and care policies and programmes of the National Panel on Solidarity and Social Development, prepared within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Bolivian Social Strategy, which outlined the general features of a social policy closely linked to economic policy.

3. In order to bring the existing legislation into line with the provisions of the Convention, the Children's Code had been drafted and had been adopted on first reading by the Senate. The Code promoted the integral development of children; established a standard of universality; formulated social policies on prevention and care; enumerated the rights of the child and set up legislative, judicial, administrative and other mechanisms to regulate the observance of those rights; outlined measures to protect children in especially difficult circumstances, and raised the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years.

4. Furthermore, the National Panel on Solidarity and Social Development had adopted a number of measures designed to clarify and to resolve such issues as the foreign adoption of Bolivian children, the departure of children from the country and the impunity of those who committed crimes against children.

5. All of those measures had been made possible by the continuous support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), since the Government, the National Panel on Solidarity and Social Development and the UNICEF field office in Bolivia carried out joint activities in support of the principle of a "first call for children". UNICEF support was essential if children were to be provided with greater assistance and protection, and with education, training and opportunities for integration into society, through diagnostic and therapeutic centres for children who engaged in antisocial behaviour, temporary shelters for abandoned children and foster homes for children from

(Mrs. Canedo, Observer, Bolivia)

birth to six years of age. The mass media must be made aware of violence against and abuse of women, and the activities of the various agencies concerned with the problems of mothers, children and families must be coordinated.

6. With regard to the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Government of Bolivia attached the greatest importance to the defence and the development of indigenous peoples and received assistance from UNICEF through the Intercultural Bilingual Education Programme, which benefited more than 5,000 indigenous children throughout the national territory. Furthermore, with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, Bolivia had become one of the countries where, in February 1992, there had been at least two hospitals which promoted breast-feeding. It was to be hoped that the donor countries would increase the resources which they allocated to programmes and policies designed to ensure the survival, the development and the protection of children.

7. Mr. ACHARYA (Observer for Nepal) said that the radically transformed global political landscape provided a historic opportunity for the international community to devote its attention and resources to the welfare of the world's children. UNICEF and the Executive Board must find a way to respond effectively to the problems of children in the new and evolving world order. The 1990s had so far proved to be a remarkable decade for children. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the convening of the World Summit for Children, and the goals and strategies for children in the 1990s adopted by the UNICEF Executive Board represented the culmination of the Fund's efforts to improve the status of children by the year 2000.

8. Vast progress had already been made in implementing the goals envisaged in the Summit Plan of Action - for example, in such areas as universal child immunization, oral rehydration therapy and the treatment of acute respiratory infections - which had helped to reduce child mortality rates in many developing countries. UNICEF was now facing the challenge of broadening and sustaining the progress achieved, for which substantial resources would be required. The developing countries, in which the majority of the world's children lived, could not shoulder that responsibility on their own. Without substantial external support, the developing countries, especially the least developed among them, would not be able to achieve the goals set for the year 2000.

9. At the national level, the Government of Nepal was determined to improve the condition of children. The convening of the World Summit for Children had coincided with the restoration of democracy in Nepal, and the new Government had accorded the highest priority to ameliorating the plight of Nepalese children. Nepal had recently ratified its first United Nations conventions, namely, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Nepal had also signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Development and Protection of

(Mr. Acharya, Observer, Nepal)

Children and the Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children. It had already prepared its national programme of action with a view to implementing the global goals for children and for development, goals which had been duly adapted to the Nepalese context. Likewise, the five-year plan for the period 1992-1996 gave the highest priority to the implementation of the strategies contained in the national programme of action and the achievement of its goals. Measures were currently being adopted for the enforcement of the laws prohibiting child labour, child exploitation and early childhood marriage. Moreover, numerous governmental and non-governmental organization had undertaken initiatives to ameliorate the plight of children and women throughout the country.

10. Nepal had meagre resources at its disposal and the constraints arising from poverty, illiteracy and ignorance had a debilitating effect on its capacity for action. Accordingly, his delegation appealed to the international community and to the multilateral institutions to continue to provide generous assistance to the developing countries. Likewise, he urged the industrialized countries to prepare their own national programmes of action and to review their level of development cooperation with the developing countries.

11. The seven member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) accorded the highest priority to the question of women and children. In South Asia, the region with the greatest number of children living in conditions of absolute hunger and poverty, the plight of children was desperate. One of the decisions taken by the Association in the field of child welfare was to incorporate the recommendations of the World Summit into a regional action plan. The decade 1990-2000 had been designated the Decade of the Girl Child; moreover, at the SAARC summit conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in December 1991, it had been decided to convene another SAARC conference on children. Recently, at the initiative of the UNICEF Regional Office for Asia, a consultative meeting of SAARC parliamentarians had been held in Kathmandu to prepare common strategies to reach the goals of the Summit by the year 2000.

12. His delegation supported the Executive Director's decision to give the highest priority to the countries of Africa, but believed that adequate relief should continue to be given to the least developed countries, both in Africa and elsewhere in the world. It was concerned about the plight of children in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. The international community and UNICEF should support the children of those regions, without reducing or diverting resources that should go on a priority basis to the least developed countries. His delegation also supported the protection UNICEF had given to children in emergency situations resulting from natural disasters, wars and civil strife, and welcomed the close cooperation of UNICEF with the newly established Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations, as well as with WHO, WFP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in responding to emergency situations.

(Mr. Acharya, Observer, Nepal)

13. His delegation supported the policies and priorities presented in the UNICEF medium-term plan (1992-1995) (E/ICEF/1992/3) and agreed with the criteria for general resources allocation. However, it wished to point out to the Executive Board that the increases proposed for education, water supply and sanitation might not materialize, given the modest increases in revenues forecast in the current plan. In view of the colossal task UNICEF was facing, the international community - and in particular the donor countries - should continue to contribute generously to UNICEF supplementary funds.

14. Lastly, there was no doubt that the environment in which children lived had a direct bearing on their general level of development. The lack of safe drinking water, poor or non-existent sanitation facilities, widespread poverty and the developing countries' population explosion had a negative impact on child survival, growth and development. He welcomed UNICEF's attempts to include an environmental component in its programmes. The Joint UNICEF/WHO Committee and its intersectoral approach to formulation of health, family planning, water supply and sanitation programmes would do much to ensure a safe and healthy environment for children's growth and development.

15. In conclusion, his delegation welcomed the recent establishment, in Kathmandu, of the UNICEF regional office for South Asia, which betokened a renewed commitment on the part of UNICEF to ensuring the welfare of the children of the entire region.

16. Mrs. DAMUSIS (Observer for Lithuania), speaking on behalf of the Baltic States, said that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were experiencing great political, economic and social upheavals during their transition to a market economy and that the health of children, women and other vulnerable groups was at risk. During the decades of failed central planning, the welfare of those groups had been neglected and their plight was now worsened by the deterioration of the economy and by social unrest. The Governments of the Baltic States thanked UNICEF for the mission it had sent at the beginning of 1992 and for its very useful report on the pressing needs of children in those States, as well as for its prompt initial emergency assistance.

17. The Baltic States were sensitive to the critical needs of women and children in the developing world and firmly supported the priority given by UNICEF to the poorest and least developed countries, particularly those of the African continent. At the same time, it was only fair that UNICEF should give assistance on the same terms to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States that met the requirements for receiving UNICEF support.

18. In the case of Lithuania, a small amount of assistance from supplementary funds would guarantee that long-term progress would not be compromised by short-term requirements, and would contribute to the maintenance of a minimum level of health and nutrition at a time when the Governments of the Baltic States were facing grave difficulties. The ability of families to meet their

(Mrs. Damusis, Observer, Lithuania)

own needs had been diminished by rising unemployment and prices and falling incomes. With every passing day it became increasingly evident that the effects of the transition process had been grossly underestimated. Government agencies were not equipped to deal with the needs of the most vulnerable groups, namely women and children, when their need for assistance was most acute. The non-governmental organizations and private volunteer organizations that had existed in the first years of independence had been destroyed in the course of the last 50 years and were only just beginning to be rebuilt.

19. Central and Eastern Europe were suffering from a chronic shortage of essential vaccines and lacked basic medical and surgical supplies as well as the essential medications to treat respiratory, allergic and degenerative diseases and the most common adult health problems: diabetes, heart disease, asthma, hypertension and infections. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were therefore having serious difficulty in maintaining essential health services and, a fortiori, in becoming self-sufficient in that area through the local production of pharmaceuticals.

20. The Baltic States' decades-long isolation and the resultant lack of up-to-date information, support for research and access to the latest knowledge and methods was complicating the transformation of the existing system, which suffered from a lack of adequate equipment for basic maternal and child health care.

21. For those reasons, the Baltic States needed UNICEF assistance as part of a common United Nations approach involving programmes to help achieve sustainable development and to create efficient systems for the acquisition and distribution of medical equipment and networks of up-to-date medical information that would enable them to meet the commitments made at the World Summit for Children.

22. The Baltic States supported the draft resolution presented by Poland on Central and Eastern Europe calling for an extension of UNICEF services to countries of that region and to the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltics. Such an extension would represent only a small fraction of total expenditures world-wide and would prevent the collapse of their infrastructure and the resultant necessity for much greater investments in the future.

23. Mr. ETEFFA (Ethiopia) said that activities related to the well-being of children should be based on a global vision; some children in the industrialized countries experienced the same difficulties as children in the developing world, and the fate of children was inseparably linked to the well-being of society at large. Sustainable care for children could not be achieved without eliminating poverty in the developing world.

24. In many developing countries women were subordinate to men; they were less educated - in part because they were given in marriage at a very early age and thus, especially in Africa, took on a multitude of domestic and

(Mr. Eteffa, Ethiopia)

production responsibilities - and less well nourished, and that subordinate status affected children more directly than any other social or economic factor. Approximately 500,000 women died each year from causes related to child-bearing, the vast majority of them in developing countries. Studies indicated that 7 million perinatal deaths each year were associated with women's general ill-health and poor nutritional status prior to and during pregnancy. For the same reasons, 21 million infants were born each year with low birth weight and were thus far more likely to die of infectious diseases or to suffer developmental problems. Moreover, only 5 to 10 per cent of the children born in such conditions lived beyond their first year. Therefore, improving the status of women would have an impact on improving the quality of life of mothers and, consequently, of their children and husbands.

25. Ethiopia had taken various concrete steps towards formulating a national programme of action, which was in its final stage of implementation, and, in an effort to integrate women's issues into the planning process, a women's unit had been established in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and various sensitization workshops had been conducted at the national and regional levels. In addition, at a summit conference of heads of State held at Addis Ababa to address political, social and humanitarian issues of the Horn of Africa, cooperation agreements had been arrived at. A follow-up conference had been held two weeks earlier at Bahir Dar to deal with the problems of Somalia by bringing together elders from all parts of the country. Moreover, the new economic policy, the democratization process and decentralization, together with the absence of conflicts, were creating a stimulating environment by enhancing access to the remote corners of the country.

26. Since the welfare of children was inseparable from education, United Nations institutions and other organizations dealing with children should coordinate their programmes, in particular in order to encourage international forums at an early age and so do away with the ignorance that engendered hatred and conflict among peoples. In addition, agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO should coordinate their efforts more and provide training for religious, political and community leaders so that children would have role models to follow in regard to their cross-cultural exposure.

27. Mr. VAN DUNEM (Angola) said that most third world countries had lately been facing difficulties such as natural disasters, drought, the continual lowering of the prices of their main export products, the high cost of manufactured products, and very high foreign debt, to say nothing of the wars that still affected some; as a result people's living conditions, especially those of children had deteriorated and poverty, famine, diseases, criminality, prostitution and infant mortality had increased.

28. The Government of Angola had made a tremendous effort to rehabilitate the health and educational structures, 50 per cent of which had been destroyed in the war that had devastated the country for the last 30 years. The Government

(Mr. Van Dunem, Angola)

had recently created a special organization, the Children's National Institute, to coordinate assistance to children. In spite of the difficult economic situation there had been some improvements in children's living conditions: the number of children in primary school had increased; the number of children vaccinated against the major childhood diseases was now higher than before independence; various maternal and child health programmes had been implemented, and the Government had provided the necessary support to orphans and abandoned children.

29. Africa was characterized by high infant mortality rates, and high illiteracy and poverty levels. International humanitarian assistance had been provided to meet emergency situations, but it did not guarantee the desirable sustainable development. The industrial countries should therefore provide their loans in a more acceptable way, such as that adopted by the United Kingdom, which was granting funds to strengthen the Angolan water and sanitation programme.

30. Once the newly signed cease-fire agreement - which was to guarantee economic rehabilitation and better management of public funds - was consolidated and democracy was successfully implemented the issues affecting Angolan children would be the following: the risk of economic collapse, characterized by inflation, low purchasing power, prostitution, juvenile delinquency and AIDS; lack of food and the consequent malnutrition among children, which exposed them to deadly diseases such as diarrhoeal disease and respiratory infections, malaria and measles; lack of motivation among many professionals involved in the delivery of priority programmes; the socio-economic burden of big families that had not been able to practise family planning; the inaccessibility and lack of security in many rural areas, which limited women's participation in traditional agricultural systems and in other productive tasks; and limited implementation of the Bamako Initiative, pending rehabilitation of the national health network. In order to tackle those problems it would be necessary to continue implementing the UNICEF programmes currently under way, and the international community would have to seek ways to mitigate the effects of structural adjustment policies.

31. Mr. KANE (Mauritania) said that the adoption, in 1989, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the holding, in 1990, of the first World Summit for Children had been two landmarks in UNICEF efforts to get States to give priority to children's issues as a result of which it was now generally agreed that human development and the fight against poverty were two fundamental development issues for the 1990s. The development of a Plan of Action for implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s had been a milestone; at the same time, despite the initiatives and reactions it had inspired, the hopes raised, in particular, by the disappearance of ideological confrontations and the end of the cold war, had yet to be realized.

(Mr. Kane, Mauritania)

32. In spite of the progress of science and technology and the notable success achieved through universal immunization campaigns and the use of oral rehydration therapy, infant and maternal mortality rates continued to rise in Africa. Despite the continued priority to Africa, given in decision 1991/13 of the Executive Board, the funds and staff devoted to that continent - amounting to one third of UNICEF general resources - were not commensurate with the magnitude of the problems.

33. The Bamako Initiative had outlined a suitable conceptual model and was being implemented in more than 18 African countries, but its implementation was being hampered by insufficient funding and by such natural phenomena as desertification. The crushing weight of debt was also hindering efforts by African countries to ensure their peoples' welfare. Accordingly, Mauritania supported the conclusions and recommendations of the group that had evaluated the said Initiative, which, in its report (E/ICEF/1992/L.20) had advised that continuous and increasing support must be given to the Bamako Initiative if its full promise was to be realized. His delegation hoped that the OAU Donors Conference on Assistance to African Children, to be held in Dakar in November 1992, would lead to renewed support from African countries in that vital area.

34. The problems of mothers and children had always been of concern to the Mauritanian authorities because of the values of Mauritanian society and the certainty that children's access to education and health constituted the best guarantee of a successful future for the country. Therefore, one of the first measures taken by the national authorities, elected in an electoral process that had led to the creation of new democratic institutions, had been to reduce the cost of common essential medications and to ensure popular participation in the management of public health programmes. That decision was in line with a new social policy that took citizens' health concerns into account and was part of a strategy of decentralization the master plan of which had been approved in 1991.

35. The new initiatives complemented a series of earlier measures to promote maternal and child health. Mauritania had been one of the first countries to adopt the expanded programme of immunization, and it had endeavoured to provide consistent primary health care, achieving over 60 per cent coverage in rural areas. Satisfactory progress was also being made in education, and the authorities were promoting and supporting education for women.

36. At the regional level, Mauritania was taking part in efforts to eradicate dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease). In the context of the recommendations adopted by the international workshop to evaluate programmes in that field held recently in Nouakchott, Mauritania had adopted a national plan for guinea worm eradication by 1995.

(Mr. Kane, Mauritania)

37. In Mauritania, mothers and children were viewed as essential parts of the family unit, which determined the overall development of society. For that reason, Mauritania had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in May 1991 and was organizing each year the commemoration of the Day of the African Child. A national action plan for the survival, protection and development of the Mauritanian child was currently being drafted.

38. Because of the efforts of UNICEF and its dedicated staff, the problems of children were receiving special attention world-wide. Their living conditions, however, reflected all types of problems. In South Africa and in Palestine, children remained subject to oppression and occupation; in other parts of the world they were the innocent victims of bloody conflict; in some countries they were the first to experience the effects of structural adjustment policies. Furthermore, preventable diseases, exacerbated by intolerable poverty, continued to exact a high toll on children. It could only be hoped that with the new legal instruments, which had been signed by the vast majority of States, children would truly become a global priority.

39. Mr. SERGIWA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his country was proud of the untiring efforts of UNICEF to achieve the goals set at the World Summit for Children, and that it supported the strategies adopted to ensure respect for and protection of the lives of children. Those efforts and strategies were an essential element in the economic and social development of all countries, along with UNICEF strategies in developing countries to establish national programmes of action for protection of mothers and children and to provide for their education, health, housing and nutrition.

40. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, which attached great importance to the protection of mothers and children, had adopted national measures in that area. The previous year, it had established a National Committee to monitor compliance, assisted by the secretariats of several peoples' committees with responsibility for the application of special resolutions and programmes for the protection of children.

41. His country was currently suffering the negative effects of the air embargo imposed by Security Council resolution 748 (1992) despite its positive response to the requirements of Security Council resolution 731 (1992).

42. The embargo had given rise to many economic and social problems. The health sector had seriously deteriorated; for example, there were no antibiotics or vaccines to be found in the country, and diseases were spreading among school-aged children. There were no medicines at all which required rapid air shipment under refrigeration. UNICEF must acknowledge the importance of that humanitarian question, since depriving children - especially nursing infants - of vaccines, medicines and food was equivalent to endangering their lives.

(Mr. Sergiwa, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

43. UNICEF, which was committed to the objective of improving protection for children, could not accept a violation of their rights on the basis of a Security Council resolution; on the contrary, it should take a strong position in favour of a solution to those problems.

44. His delegation welcomed the efforts of UNICEF and WHO to promote breast-feeding, because of its great psychological and social benefits to children. The Koran commanded that mothers should nurse their children for two full years. His delegation also recognized UNICEF efforts to assist children in difficult circumstances. The situation of children in the occupied Arab territories in Palestine had gone beyond tragedy, and it could only be hoped that special programmes could give the children the help they needed. The desperate situation of women and children in Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank should be resolved with the help of the Executive Board.

45. UNICEF must continue to devote resources to the needs of mothers and children in Africa, whose sufferings were more acute than in any other part of the world owing to the deteriorating economic situation caused by the continuing drought. The commemoration of the Day of the African Child demonstrated the importance attached by UNICEF to the difficult situation of mothers and children in Africa and helped to attract world attention. The conference on Africa to be held in Senegal in November was of special significance.

46. He wished to emphasize the importance his delegation attached to the role of family in the protection of children, as well as the development of their abilities and personality. UNICEF should place greater emphasis on the family, and should help in its formation and to improve its economic and social conditions.

47. Mr. GOLOB (Slovenia) said that UNICEF had made an essential impact on the Final Document of the Earth Summit just adopted in Rio de Janeiro. There were many facets to the contribution of UNICEF to the modern world. Its purpose was to give hope and to act with compassion in response to sufferings caused by natural disasters, disease, poverty, and disasters caused by man's own irresponsibility.

48. He had no desire to begin a political debate in UNICEF or on the Executive Board, especially regarding the issue of what would replace the former Yugoslavia. That issue should be settled at the peace conference to be held in Brussels, and in the Security Council and the General Assembly in due course. His only intention was to respond to the concerns of several delegations which, at the beginning of the current session, had expressed reservations on the matter. No one could take upon themselves the right to speak on behalf of all those who were experiencing unspeakable suffering in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

(Mr. Golob, Slovenia)

49. Slovenia had followed with intense interest the development and completion of the World Summit for Children, held in New York on 30 September 1990, and would very soon sign the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children adopted on that occasion. Furthermore, Slovenia supported the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The parliamentary procedures for its accession to the Convention would be completed in June.

50. For quite some time, Slovenia had had an active national committee for UNICEF. In 1989, more than 2 million UNICEF greeting cards had been sold in Slovenia, or more than one per inhabitant. That figure could be reached again and even surpassed, and there were many other ways in which Slovenia could contribute to UNICEF's work.

51. Board members were well aware of the situation in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia. Large numbers of refugees from both republics - mothers, children and pregnant women for the most part - had fled to the Republic of Slovenia. In some areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina hundreds of thousands of people were surrounded, without any means of survival. If no international measures were taken to achieve a peaceful solution to the crisis, those people could also become refugees.

52. Although his country was proud to offer safe haven to people who were being persecuted, it was experiencing difficulties in meeting their basic needs. The number of temporary refugees in Slovenia had reached more than 8 per cent of the country's total population. As of 1 June 1992, nearly half were children under 16 years of age and 40 per cent were women.

53. Of late, refugees had had to live in tents since no more could be accommodated in the available buildings. The Slovene Red Cross, Caritas Internationalis and other humanitarian organizations were continuously soliciting the people of Slovenia for financial and material assistance and had received a very generous response. The University of Ljubljana and other Slovene institutions and organizations had joined the effort with their knowledge and expertise.

54. Slovenia felt duty-bound to help the refugees by every means in its power, but alone it could not offer them well-being. However, international aid was unfortunately too modest and too slow, and would have been more effective if more consideration had been given to what was needed and what was easily available locally provided there was money to buy it.

55. Aid had been received from the International Committee of the Red Cross and Caritas Internationalis, and from Austria, Germany and Italy, among others. The International Islamic Relief Organization would soon be providing assistance.

(Mr. Golob, Slovenia)

56. Slovenia was well aware that children and mothers elsewhere in the world were suffering hunger, sickness and need. However, further help from UNICEF would relieve the suffering of the refugee children and mothers in Slovenia, and would also ease the burden on Slovenia itself, which was struggling to move ahead while doing its humanitarian duty.

57. UNICEF material assistance to date had been most welcome; the Executive Board might wish to consider making an appeal to Governments, and particularly those of Europe, for increased humanitarian aid to refugees in Slovenia. It might be advisable for UNICEF to establish a one-person temporary office in Ljubljana.

58. It was also of enormous importance for UNICEF to continue its participation in the multi-stage conference on refugees in Slovenia. His delegation had suggested a European conference on the issue of refugees, including children, and would very much appreciate UNICEF support for such a project.

59. The situation in the former Yugoslavia could be alleviated only by the restoration of peace and respect for established borders and the sovereignty of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia. The international community should help to establish humanitarian corridors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, creating safety zones all over the Republic and securing the airport in Sarajevo for humanitarian purposes.

60. Mrs. TERRY (Cuba) said that her Government accorded a high priority to maternal and child health and to the child's full development in the context of Cuba's endeavour to bring about a qualitative transformation in standard's of living, which was reflected in the very positive results of the policies and programmes for children promoted over the past three decades.

61. Cuba was gratified, for instance, to be able to state that it had been possible to reduce the infant mortality rate to 10.7 per 1,000 live births and to eradicate various diseases, including poliomyelitis, diphtheria, measles and rubella. Also, owing to the AIDS prevention and control programme that had been developed, the AIDS pandemic did not pose a threat to maternal and child health in Cuba. The achievements of the Cuban revolution in the sphere of education, which combined academic training, links to productive work, artistic development and values of solidarity and cooperation, were also a source of national pride. The illiteracy rate had been reduced to 1.9 per cent of the population aged 10 to 49; 90 per cent of those aged 6 to 14 were enrolled in school, and a special programme available to handicapped children had helped more than 63,000 pupils.

62. World events that had affected Cuba's international trade were obliging it to strengthen its capacity to go on protecting those and other achievements. Cuba had committed itself to meeting the goals of the World Summit for Children, as demonstrated by its national action programme, which

(Mrs. Terry, Cuba)

was based on the fundamental premise that the welfare of mothers and children should continue to be promoted. At the current session, the Executive Board would be considering the cooperation programme that Cuba planned to implement with the support of UNICEF in the period 1992-1996 to meet the goals of the Programme of Action. She asked Board members for the greatest possible understanding of the measures that Cuba planned to adopt in that context.

63. Although her delegation might be able to approve the proposals on a new world order contained in the UNICEF report entitled The State of the World's Children 1992, she thought that in order to implement them fully a context of true international cooperation was needed and that to achieve the goals outlined in the report structural rather than ad hoc changes would be required. Coercive measures must cease to be employed against nations, since they only victimized the most vulnerable groups, particularly children, and any pledge or initiative to confront or overcome the problems of children could succeed only if the root causes of such problems were eliminated; and that could be done only by reducing the world's existing socio-economic disparities. Her delegation noted, however, that the report had not seen the problem of children as a phenomenon linked to underdevelopment or as the consequence of a world-wide process of social differentiation that generated wealth for a few and poverty for many more.

64. Cuba was prepared to endure its current economic difficulties and meet the challenge posed by new external conditions, not only because it was determined to resist and to triumph, but also because in the course of 32 years the revolution had achieved sufficient industrial, scientific and technological development to enable it to do so. Without doubt, the contribution of UNICEF would be of great assistance.

65. Mr. KLINK (Holy See) said that he was pleased to note the signing or ratification by 137 countries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the signing of the Convention by Governments should be supplemented by a mobilization of world opinion and of every family for the promotion of the rights of the child. Such a mobilization of public opinion in favour of children was one of the special tasks that were clearly within the mandate of UNICEF.

66. He endorsed the views of the delegations that had already spoken in favour of the special protection that needed to be continually afforded to children suffering from hostilities or their aftermath.
His Holiness Pope John Paul II had continually called for a cessation of all hostile acts, whose only outcome was more suffering for the most vulnerable. In keeping with that message, in April 1992, His Holiness had dispatched a humanitarian mission to Iraq to express his solidarity with those most affected by the consequences of the Gulf war. With regard to the hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he had called on the pontifical council Cor Unum to intensify its coordinating work with aid organizations and launched an appeal for cooperation with the victims of the conflict.

(Mr. Klink, Holy See)

67. The Holy See had been very happy to note the recent establishment of the United Nations Central Emergency Revolving Fund, which it was certain would add to the effectiveness of international efforts to assist in times of crisis, and looked forward to close collaboration with the Under-Secretary-General appointed to head the Fund, Mr. Jan Eliasson, who had been received by the Holy Father and had met with the officials of Cor Unum.

68. The Holy See shared the view that UNICEF must coordinate and not duplicate efforts in managing the resources available for humanitarian needs, and must give priority to long-term development of sovereign national infrastructure rather than short-term effectiveness. It had also noted the concern on the part of many delegations that UNICEF was attempting to do too much, thereby "watering down" its mandate for effective efforts on behalf of mothers and children.

69. The Holy See viewed with concern the conflicting calls by some donor countries for UNICEF to involve itself further and further in activities aimed at the planning of family size or other similar interventions that exceeded its basic mandate. UNICEF must at all costs avoid linking aid for development with the dictates of the wealthier nations as to the "appropriate" size of families in developing countries and imposing its views as to the best means to achieve that end.

70. The delegation of the Holy See was not proposing that UNICEF should cease its balanced approach concerning information about such matters, nor was it in favour of procreation at any cost. On the contrary, it emphasized the right of spouses to decide on the size of their families without pressures from Governments or organizations and stressed that the decision must be taken with the greatest responsibility and must respect the moral order established by God.

71. In that regard, the Holy See had taken careful note of the statement contained in the Executive Director's report to the effect that UNICEF's involvement in responsible planning of family size was limited to promoting knowledge of the benefits of birth spacing. If UNICEF were to go beyond that clear mandate, it would run the risk of becoming the instrument of population policies dictated by the donor countries rather than serving as an independent instrument for long-term development change in sovereign developing States.

72. As for the summary of the goals for the 1990s which had been agreed at the World Summit for Children, contained in The State of the World's Children 1992, the Holy See drew attention to the inadvertent omission of the chapeau paragraph which referred to the goals' "appropriate adaptation to the specific situation of each country in terms of phasing, standards, priorities and availability of resources, with respect for cultural, religious and social traditions", and also of the phrase stating that "additional goals that are particularly relevant to a country's specific situation should be added in its national plan of action". That paragraph clearly expressed UNICEF's

(Mr. Klink, Holy See)

traditional respect for cultural and religious diversities, and the Holy See hoped that the omitted phrases would be included in all future publications referring to those goals.

73. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakhstan) said that her delegation appreciated UNICEF's activities on behalf of children in the overall context of development. The first experience of direct cooperation between Kazakhstan and UNICEF - the dispatch of a joint UNICEF-WHO mission to the country at the beginning of the year - had strengthened relations between Kazakhstan and UNICEF. Her delegation took the opportunity to express its gratitude to the UNICEF authorities and to those who had taken part in the mission for their efforts to assess Kazakhstan's most urgent health needs, and expressed the hope that the mission's report would become one of the main pillars of world-wide action directed at supplying humanitarian aid to the children and mothers of that country.

74. Kazakhstan's need for international aid was related to the complex problems inherent in the transition from a centralized system to a market economy, including a fall in the standard of living of the population which created serious problems, especially in the area of protection of children and mothers. In addition, there was another lamentable phenomenon, namely, the danger to the environment arising from the virtual disappearance of the Aral Sea, which affected not only the local population but the entire world. As a result of 30 years of human intervention the level of the Aral Sea had fallen by 15 metres and its surface area had been reduced by 50 per cent, while its salinity had tripled. The economic situation created by that phenomenon was particularly hazardous to the population and children of the region, as demonstrated by the infant mortality figures, which were the highest in the country, and the rapid increase in morbidity over the last 15 years.

75. In addition, there were other important problems such as water supply, nutrition and medical assistance. In that connection, she recalled that UNICEF had been one of the co-sponsors of the International Conference on Primary Health Care held in Alma Ata 14 years earlier, and that it had always given its support in the field of primary health care. Like the other republics of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was encountering serious health care problems. Consequently, she also expressed the hope that Kazakhstan would be able to count on UNICEF's assistance in child immunization.

76. Referring to the Tashkent Declaration on cooperation between the countries of central Asia and the mobilization of all who were interested in helping to meet the basic needs of those countries, she expressed the hope that during the current session a balanced decision would be taken on the assistance to be given to Kazakhstan and the other republics of the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, her delegation supported the mobilization of additional resources, and the use of non-traditional sources of funding and the coordination, in that context, of the efforts of UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and other international organizations.

(Ms. Arystanbekova, Kazakhstan)

77. The previous month the President of Kazakhstan had issued a document containing his views concerning a strategy for turning Kazakhstan into an independent, peaceful and democratic State and an open society, and which envisaged the adoption of specific measures to promote the interests of all the inhabitants of the country, especially the youngest. Kazakhstan had ample opportunities to bring about radical reforms by availing itself of the international experience which had been acquired in solving current socio-economic problems. UNICEF was one of the most important organizations operating in that sphere, and her delegation was anxious that that role be strengthened.

78. Mr. STEFANOV (Observer for Bulgaria) said that the social aspects of the reform initiated in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, characterized by a rapid transformation of the economies of those countries, were becoming increasingly urgent and called for considerable support from the international community at the present crucial stage. Despite the precautions that had been taken to ensure that the reform did not have an adverse impact, a number of social groups in Bulgaria were suffering from the reform. Unemployment was having a direct impact on household income and dietary standards; inflation and declining spending on social security, health and education had caused a sharp drop in pre-school enrolment; the housing shortage had resulted in growing numbers of homeless persons, including children, and the shortage and soaring prices of medicine had caused a decline in official spending on health care and social security subsidies. The infant mortality rate was rising, the birth rate was at an all-time low and there was a negative population growth of 0.4 per 1,000.

79. All those indicators testified to a drastic deterioration in living standards, a trend that might continue, or even intensify, over the next few years. There was therefore an urgent need for early detection of any sudden deterioration in current living conditions and better monitoring and measurement of the parameters of children's living standards in order to make it easier to alert the international community to potential social problems and to prevent any serious physical or social damage.

80. Bulgaria had signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At present, steps were being taken to harmonize national legislation with the provisions and norms underlying the Convention. For example, in the national budget for 1992 there was a slight increase, compared with 1991, in the funds allocated to education and health care, although the figures were still too low.

81. Following the World Summit for Children, many positive steps had been taken in Bulgaria to facilitate the implementation of the commitments made in that respect. With the professional guidance and assistance of the UNICEF secretariat, a nationwide analysis had been undertaken of the situation of children and families. An inter-agency task force had been established to

(Mr. Stefanov, Observer, Bulgaria)

collect data, analyse the problems, determine the objectives of the national programme of action and monitor the progress made. Such activities had to comply with the pressing political and economic priorities and the immediate problems caused by the economic difficulties.

82. UNICEF activities in Central and Eastern Europe should be expanded on the basis of a detailed programme that would enable the countries of the region to make the fullest use of the allocated funds. It was important and timely to establish a mechanism to monitor and provide assistance to children living in difficult circumstances.

83. His delegation also expressed the hope that the UNICEF Office in Geneva and the International Child Development Centre in Florence would play a major role in programme formulation in Central and Eastern Europe. Bulgaria supported the new UNICEF programmes on the protection of children and mothers and the increasingly important role played by UNICEF in the programme on education for development. Bulgarian government agencies and institutions were coordinating their activities for the implementation of the programme in the country.

84. Mr. REY (Colombia) said that, two years after making the commitments called for by the World Summit for Children and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Colombia could take pride in having met the stated objectives and presented a national action programme for children in which a coherent medium-term action strategy had been formulated in the areas of health, nutrition, education and basic sanitation on the basis of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s and on a conception of the child as an integral part of the family and society and as a person with rights and obligations, as was also provided in the new national constitution. In developing that programme, particular attention had been paid to the most vulnerable sectors of society.

85. The eradication of poverty and the welfare of the child were priorities that called for new forms of funding such as those proposed by the Executive Director in his report: debt relief for the sake of children and allocation to children's programmes of part of the resources freed up by disarmament.

86. The Government of Colombia had reaffirmed its commitment to children at the regional as well as the national level by taking part in various summits of heads of State, such as the Ibero-American meeting held in Guadalajara, Mexico, at which it had been decided to coordinate programmes regionally; and in the summit of the first ladies of the Americas, held in Colombia, at which ideas and experiences had been exchanged; and by supporting the activities undertaken by the countries of Central America, including the multigrade school for rural areas, known as the "new school", which had been initiated in Colombia and was beginning to be applied in other countries of the region with the support of UNICEF; the emergency programme to combat cholera, which had made it possible to alleviate the impact of the epidemic, and the programme for children of the Amazon region.

(Mr. Rey, Colombia)

87. Colombia would look very favourably on any decision by the Executive Board to continue the activities of the Special Adjustment Facility for Latin America and the Caribbean (SAFLAC) beyond 1993, since, although it had been an innovative strategy aimed at achieving one of the objectives of UNICEF, "adjustment with a human face", and had led to the initiation of projects in 17 countries of the region in priority sectors such as promotion of the interests of children, strengthening of institutional capacity and human resource training, the socio-economic conditions that had made its creation necessary would persist during the present decade.

88. He shared the concern expressed by the Executive Director in his annual report with the fact that no financial resources had been allotted for the implementation of action programmes, and urged that new sources of funding should continue to be sought for the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, which, since the Rio summit, had been complemented with Agenda 21, which set clear goals to improve the standard of living of the most numerous groups: women, children, youth, indigenous people and peasants.

89. Mr. STELZER (Austria) said that recently, UNICEF had been challenged by new emergencies such as the tragic situation of children and mothers in the drought-stricken regions of Africa or the plight of children in countries torn by civil war such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Such events illustrated that the children of the world continued to be exposed to man-made and natural disasters and crises.

90. His delegation believed that the two policy papers entitled "Towards a New World Order for Children" (E/ICEF/1992/2/Part I) and "Medium-term Plan for the Period 1992-95" (E/ICEF/1992/3) rightly assessed the comparative advantage of UNICEF to be, first, its field-based and field-oriented organization and, secondly, its approach of successfully enhancing social mobilization to expand awareness of, and facilitate participation in the relevant programmes.

91. He commended UNICEF on having resisted some of the bureaucratic dynamics leading to concentration of activities at headquarters. In its future strategy, which should include Governments, local communities and NGOs, UNICEF should direct much of its expertise towards capacity-building and thus enable the recipients to increasingly make their own decisions and to act as equal partners in cooperative arrangements.

92. Recalling the UNICEF contributions that had benefited thousands of Austrian children during the country's reconstruction after the last world war, Austria acknowledged that UNICEF had to assume its mandate in alleviating children's suffering from the effects of devastating wars in neighbouring countries. The Austrian National Committee for UNICEF had succeeded, in recent years, through its commendable fund-raising efforts, in matching government contributions to UNICEF. At the same time, the Austrian Government had stepped up its efforts to increase its contributions to UNICEF; and, in

(Mr. Stelzer, Austria)

the context of its cooperation with UNICEF, had initiated negotiations on a junior professional officer agreement which, once concluded, should allow Austria to fund assignments of personnel to UNICEF operations in developing countries.

93. Early in 1992, Austria had signed the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children approved at the World Summit for Children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was currently in the process of being ratified by the Austrian Parliament and would reinforce provisions already existing in Austrian law.

94. Austria's bilateral development assistance sought above all to solve basic infrastructural problems. For instance, objectives like securing safe drinking water clearly illustrated that an improved environment had direct effects on the welfare of children.

95. His Government had been very impressed with the report of the joint UNICEF/WHO collaborative mission to the newly independent States and the Baltic States. The findings clearly indicated the urgency of assistance to those countries in their transition process. His delegation supported the recent consensus of the UNDP Governing Council and the recommendations of the UNICEF Executive Board that any new activities in Central and Eastern Europe should be undertaken with the fullest cooperation of the various parts of the United Nations system.

96. Austria had been a major donor to those countries, albeit mainly through bilateral channels. The activities of UNICEF and other multilateral donors were welcomed as a useful complement. They would, however, have to be funded through additional resources and must not result in a change of the traditional priorities of United Nations development organizations. Austria fully supported UNICEF priorities for the least developed countries, to which more than 40 per cent of all programme resources were allocated.

The meeting rose at 8.50 p.m.